entific response, as did 22 percent of the high school graduates, compared with 35 percent of the college graduates. Among those classified as attentive to S&T, 34 percent answered correctly. (See appendix table 7-59.)

Conclusion

Although Americans express a high level of interest in S&T, they lack confidence in their knowledge of these subjects. In 2001, less than 15 percent thought that they were well informed about S&T. In addition, few Americans follow news stories about scientific breakthroughs, research, and exploration. Those with more years of formal education and those who have taken more courses in science and mathematics are more likely than others to express a high level of interest in S&T and to believe that they are well informed.

Data on science literacy in the United States indicate that most Americans do not know a lot about S&T. The percentage of correct responses to a battery of questions designed to assess the level of knowledge and understanding of science terms and concepts has not changed appreciably in the past few years. In addition, approximately 70 percent of Americans do not understand the scientific process. Individuals with more years of formal schooling and who have completed more courses in science and mathematics were more likely than others to provide correct responses to the science literacy questions.

Americans have highly positive attitudes toward S&T, strongly support the Federal Government's investment in basic research, and have high regard for the science community. In addition, most people believe that scientists and engineers lead rewarding professional and personal lives, although a stereotypical image of these professions, rooted in popular culture, does exist and has been difficult to dislodge.

Some individuals harbor reservations about science and technology, especially about technology and its effect on society. Although anti-biotechnology sentiments are much more common in Europe, U.S. support for genetic engineering has declined during the past 15 years.

The vast majority of the public believes that global warming exists and that it should be treated as a serious problem. However, Americans think that environmental pollution is not one of the most important problems facing the country today. They are more concerned about economic and especially education issues—more than two-thirds believe that the quality of science and mathematics education in American schools is inadequate.

Belief in pseudoscience is relatively widespread and growing. In addition, the media have come under criticism, especially by scientists, for sometimes providing a distorted view of science and the scientific process and thus contributing to scientific illiteracy.

Americans get most of their information about the latest developments in S&T from watching television, although the Internet is beginning to make inroads. It is now the leading source of information on specific scientific issues. The rapid growth of information technologies, including the Internet, is thoroughly explored in chapter 8, "Significance of Information Technologies."

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